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UNHCR INSPECTION AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. During the past year, the inspection and evaluation functions in UNHCR have undergone a significant period of development and transition. In an attempt to improve internal oversight, a system of field inspections has been introduced and a new approach to evaluation has been adopted which relies to a much greater extent on the use of outside expertise. Evaluation coverage has been further expanded through the use of built-in evaluation mechanisms used by operational and support staff. In addition, lessons-learned workshops have been organized and turned into evaluation tools.

2. With the establishment of the inspection function, new systems and procedures have had to be developed. A major endeavour for the Inspection and Evaluation Service has been the preparation of an Inspection Handbook for the guidance of inspection staff. In addition to adapting existing methodology to UNHCR, new approaches were designed to cover activities unique to the Office. Wherever possible, a common approach to inspection and evaluation was also introduced in order to share resources as well as to avoid potential duplication and overlap between the two closely-related functions.

3. While in many respects similar, UNHCR's inspection and evaluation methods diverge where the differing aims of the two functions dictate special treatment. Both functions rely on, for example, extensive consultation with senior management in determining the work to be carried out. Inspections are primarily selected by the High Commissioner in consultation with the Deputy High Commissioner, Assistant High Commissioner, and Directors of Regional Bureaux and Divisions. Other relevant organizational elements, such as internal audit and the UNHCR Mediator, are also consulted, as appropriate. Similarly, evaluation topics are selected through a rigorous process in which key operational, policy and management concerns and issues are systematically compiled. Through a series of consultations with senior management, the highest priority evaluations are then selected for the final work programme.

Follow-up on findings and recommendations

4. Follow-up to inspections commences with a written report and a presentation of the inspection team's conclusions and recommendations to the High Commissioner. Field staff are provided with an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of the findings and feasibility of implementing the Inspector's recommendations and any irreconcilable differences are communicated to the High Commissioner for a decision. The final report is accompanied by a Plan of Action and a timetable for compliance by designated parties. Inspection and Evaluation Service staff ensure that appropriate action is being initiated in accordance with the Plan of Action. Moreover, overall compliance with the plans is periodically analysed with the aim of achieving a truly constructive relationship between inspection and operations. Such endeavours are in line with the emphasis of the June Standing Committee meeting on the need for developing within UNHCR adequate mechanisms for regular monitoring of the implementation of oversight recommendations.

5. While inspections require a high degree of confidentiality, most evaluations provide the greatest benefit when their results and analyses are disseminated to those programme managers and training staff who can benefit from the lessons and through a review of the issues. To guarantee that evaluation findings are effectively communicated and acted upon, evaluation results are presented to the Senior Management Committee chaired by the High Commissioner. Specific members of the Committee are then requested to assume responsibility for ensuring appropriate follow-up and reporting back to the Committee on action taken. Staff of the Inspection and Evaluation Service are in turn expected to monitor progress in implementing recommendations.

6. Follow-up to both inspections and evaluations has been greatly facilitated by the introduction of a computerized database shared by the two functions. The database, which includes all inspection and evaluation reports along with relevant follow-up documents, provides a means of systematically tracking the implementation of recommendations as well as a way of allowing UNHCR to identify common issues across countries. It also contains follow-up statistics and analysis to enhance policy formulation as the system develops.

II. INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

7. Since the High Commissioner's initial report on inspection activities in September 1995 (A/AC.96/852), inspection missions have been carried out in more than 30 countries, and as a consequence, have systematically covered key operations in a number of regions which include the Middle East, South America and the Caribbean, Northern Europe, southern Africa as well as key countries in West and Central Africa and the Asian sub-continent.

8. UNHCR inspection missions tend to be broad, comprehensive reviews of specific country or regional activities with a view to improving overall management and operational performance. In carrying out their work, inspection teams assess management effectiveness and efficiency as well as progress toward achieving operational aims and compliance with organizational policies.

9. Inspection recommendations vary greatly among countries and operations. Nevertheless, the analysis of recommendations made over the reporting period indicates that inspection findings emphasize corrections needed in the areas of: overall management; planning and strategy development; external relations; programme management; protection; office administration including organization and staffing; and staff security and welfare. A few examples of the recommendations are summarized as follows:

- (i) Representation, management, strategy, and external relations:
- Strengthening of regional collaboration in a number of sectors
 - Improving cooperation with other United Nations agencies
 - Strengthening of overall Field Office management
 - Scaling down/restructuring of country and regional operations
 - Development of country and regional objectives/strategies focused on durable solutions
 - Closure and creation of Field Offices
 - Clearer strategies for UNHCR-NGO Partnership in Action (PARinAC) follow-up
- (ii) Operational management:
- Accession to refugee instruments, along with establishment/implementation of asylum laws and procedures
 - Increased compliance with programme requirements, and improvement in project management (including strengthening of monitoring capacities)
 - Better procedures for selection of implementing partners
 - Limitations of assistance to urban cases, and review of urban assistance
 - Greater use of, and strengthening of, national structures in assisting refugees
 - Emergency contingency planning
 - Improvement in field-based registration systems
- (iii) Administrative management:
- Better follow-up on internal audit and its recommendations
 - Greater staff guidance and training
 - Improved flow of information
 - Reassignment and reorganization of Field Office functions
 - Creation, filling, and cancellation of posts as well as appointment and termination of staff
 - Modifications to conditions of service such as the length of assignment
 - Improvements to medical care and evacuation arrangements

III. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

10. Since reporting on evaluation activities to the Standing Committee in January 1996, UNHCR has finalized and begun following up on several evaluations including a study of policy and practice regarding urban refugees, an evaluation of women victims of violence, and a major lessons-learned review of the Mozambique repatriation operation. Specific reviews of reintegration programmes in Afghanistan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Mozambique were also undertaken. Moreover, staff from the Inspection and Evaluation Service assisted the Division of Human Resources Management in carrying out an appraisal of its pilot effort to integrate and unify various personnel functions within the recruitment and administration sections at Headquarters.

11. Evaluations of UNHCR reintegration programmes in Afghanistan and in Mozambique, in which no Inspection and Evaluation Service staff participated, were, however, carried out during the reporting period. The evaluation of reintegration assistance in Afghanistan was endorsed by the Assistant High Commissioner and will be used to redirect and consolidate activities in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries. The study primarily focused on UNHCR's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) programme which has sought to play a catalytic role and fill gaps in the activities of specialized United Nations agencies. The report noted the considerable achievement, despite major difficulties, of implementing some 360 QIPs and establishing an operational presence in 21 provinces.

12. The review of the reintegration programme in Mozambique was initiated by the Regional Bureau for Africa and the Branch Office in Maputo. The review was conducted jointly by staff from UNHCR, staff from the embassies of the Netherlands and the United States of America and the PARINAC focal point for southern Africa. Despite the enormous devastation and displacement generated by armed conflict in Mozambique, the reintegration process has encountered remarkably few problems. The report suggests that programme planning could have been improved through an earlier formulation of a reintegration strategy. Moreover, greater attention could have been given to UNHCR's links with longer-term development agencies. A recurrent theme of the report is the tension between implementation and sustainability. In post-conflict situations, UNHCR has an obligation to act quickly, but an equal responsibility to ensure that its activities have a lasting impact.

13. Lessons-learnt workshops were also organized to meet the growing demand for information on how both successful and unsuccessful operations were carried out. In recent months, meetings covering reintegration in Tajikistan and Mozambique, and the Great Lakes emergency have taken place (see, for example, *Lessons Learnt from the Rwanda Emergency: Further Reflections*, presented to the June 1996 meeting of the Standing Committee (EC/46/SC/CRP.28)). This approach has proved to be a highly successful way of complementing evaluation. In addition, it has provided a means of ensuring that the ideas generated in lessons-learnt evaluations are brought to the attention of those who can benefit most from them in the future.

A. Review of UNHCR's policy and practice regarding urban refugees

14. A recently completed evaluation of policy and practice regarding urban refugees is expected to have a significant impact on UNHCR's approach to this complex issue. Upon examining some of the principal problems experienced by Field Offices in coping with urban refugees, the evaluation exposed the absence of policy and organizational guidelines for handling this group. Discrepancies in how urban refugees have been identified, protected and assisted have had serious consequences on both the refugees and UNHCR. Most importantly, privileged care and maintenance has often taken precedence over the search for durable solutions.

15. A working group under the auspices of the Assistant High Commissioner is to translate the report's recommendations into policy. The working group has now finalized guidelines which take a more restrictive view to long-term assistance of urban refugees; harmonize approaches at the regional and sub-regional level; exclude, in principle, assistance to, and resettlement of, the irregular movers; exclude also material assistance to urban refugees belonging to a prima facie group for whom a rural resettlement programme exists in the country; reinforce national systems for assisting the urban poor; create credit schemes aimed at self-sufficiency; and develop a new global database for individual cases which will help UNHCR monitor and analyse its assistance as well as limit abuses. Following the presentation and approval of the working group's recommendations by the Assistant High Commissioner, the new policy guidelines will be disseminated.

B. Women Victims of Violence Project in Kenya

16. After an interim report on the evaluation of the Women Victims of Violence Project in Kenya was submitted to the forty-sixth session of the Executive Committee, a final report was presented to UNHCR's Senior Management Committee for review and follow-up. The report recommended that until there is compliance with the High Commissioner's policy on refugee women, it will be necessary to maintain women and children specialists in all regions. Also recommended were a number of innovative measures intended to enhance accountability for implementation of related policy along with various steps to close the gap with practice.

17. The report was distributed to all regional desks and Field Offices to publicize the approach adopted in Kenya and to encourage appropriate action where needed. In the coming months, managers responsible for implementing the evaluation's recommendations will report back to the Senior Management Committee. Finally, implementation of both the report's general recommendations and its specific project recommendations will be monitored closely by the Inspection and Evaluation Service. A follow-up implementation review will be presented to the Senior Management Committee.

C. UNHCR's repatriation operation to Mozambique

18. The evaluation analysed the repatriation of more than 1.5 million and refugees to Mozambique and the factors which contributed to the operation's success. Overall, the exercise confirmed the accepted view that the repatriation was a highly successful operation. Weaknesses were relatively minor in comparison with the magnitude of the achievement. Notwithstanding that, a number of principles were suggested and proposals made for strengthening UNHCR's capacity to manage voluntary repatriation programmes.

19. The evaluation emphasized that organized repatriation should have been better paced in relation to the absorptive capacity of the country of origin rather than to the movement capability of the individual countries of asylum. While understandable in the light of immense logistical difficulties, sporadic food shortages remained the programme's greatest operational deficiency. The report concluded that an assured supply of food on return to the country of origin is the single most important element of relief assistance. The evaluation also recommended that in future repatriations, a post of overall Coordinator should be established. The Coordinator would have responsibility for the repatriation operation from refugee camps to final destinations. Furthermore, a small advisory unit could be created at Headquarters which would help to preserve the knowledge and experience accumulated over successive repatriation operations and would provide a focus for the planning and administration of future repatriation operations.

20. These and additional ideas and suggestions generated by the evaluation will be put to a variety of uses. Some of the report's recommendations regarding the most suitable organizational configuration required for repatriations have been considered by the Delphi Group responsible for revisions to UNHCR's structure. The report's findings, which were widely distributed to all operations involved in planning and implementation of repatriation operations, have also formed a basis for the lessons-learnt workshop on Mozambique and are being channeled into a variety of lessons-learnt databases. Finally, lessons drawn from the report and workshop will be used in updating UNHCR's training module on repatriation.

E. Work in progress

21. Several major reviews, which form part of UNHCR's 1996 evaluation work programme, are currently in progress and include the following subjects:

- Review of UNHCR's institution-building efforts in Central Europe and the former Soviet Union
- Review of UNHCR phase-out strategies in selected countries of origin
- Review of staff security and staff stress
- Review of the selection of implementing arrangements
- Review of the UNHCR education policy
- Review of inter-organization collaboration at Headquarters
- Lessons learnt in providing security in refugee camps

IV. FUTURE CHALLENGES

22. The recent period of rapid change in UNHCR has confronted the organization with a wide range of new operational activities that require greater oversight as well as analysis and review. In responding to the challenges, UNHCR has effectively tried to do more with existing resources which have been consolidated into a single Inspection and Evaluation Service. In doing so, the inspection function has clearly had a significantly greater impact than before in carrying out activities aimed at improving management and accountability. Despite these improvements, the recent Delphi working groups have once again emphasized the need to strengthen UNHCR's inspection and evaluation functions as part of the reinforcement of all oversight mechanisms. Both functions will be particularly critical in ensuring the accountability and overall consistency of approach that will be required as UNHCR moves towards decentralization.